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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [PHUM](#) [CO](#)  
SUBJECT: GOC AND ELN PEACE TALKS INCH FORWARD, BALL IN  
ELN'S COURT

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood  
Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) The fourth round of GOC-ELN exploratory peace talks concluded October 26, and the parties will start substantive discussions in December. Most commentators regarded the result as positive but said the ELN must commit to a ceasefire implementation date and release kidnap victims before the talks could progress further. Civil society guarantor Moritz Akerman said the ELN told him it is willing to make the required commitments and in return will ask for amnesty for its imprisoned members. Akerman and Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo said the ball is now in the ELN's court. End summary.

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Fourth Round Positive, Some Disappointment  
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¶2. (C) In a joint statement issued October 26, the GOC and ELN characterized their fourth round of exploratory peace talks in Cuba as constructive and agreed to move to a substantive phase of talks. The parties divided their tasks into two baskets. The first, called "Civil Society," includes additional "Houses of Peace," a National Convention, and "regional dialogue." The second basket is entitled "Peace Environment," which will address a ceasefire, displaced persons, and amnesty. Most commentators regarded the joint statement as positive. Norwegian Charge Dag Nylander, who was in Havana as a representative of one of the "accompanying countries," said the parties reaffirmed in Havana the commitments they made recently in Caracas.

¶3. (C) Akerman told us the atmosphere deteriorated during the talks. He was encouraged by opening statements by both sides, but became disappointed as the parties failed to show flexibility on ceasefire and humanitarian issues. Akerman said much of the corridor gossip in Havana centered on the apparently poor relationship between the principal negotiators, Restrepo and ELN military commander Antonio Garcia. On two occasions, Akerman reported, ELN negotiator Francisco Galan asked Akerman to call the U.S. Embassy in Bogota to "save" the talks because the Restrepo-Garcia relationship appeared to have broken down.

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Consensus that Ball is in ELN's Court  
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¶4. (C) Akerman said ELN negotiators told him they are prepared to agree to a ceasefire, to be implemented on February 1, and are willing to release all kidnap victims. In return, the ELN will seek the release of all ELN prisoners and a GOC commitment to boost assistance to displaced persons. Still, he complained about Garcia indulging in "interminable theoretical discussions about the nature of conflict," in Havana. The ELN needed to stop issuing statements and instead present a concrete ceasefire proposal to the GOC. He said the guarantors intended to work intensively with Galan and ELN prisoner Juan Carlos Cuellar on a draft ceasefire text. Akerman reported that Garcia rejected OAS involvement in ceasefire verification activities and suggested instead the UN or EU. The ELN appeared concerned about FARC attacks during a ceasefire. Nylander told us Restrepo was tough in his concluding press conference in Cuba, saying the talks had little future if the ELN would not commit to a ceasefire and release its kidnap victims.

¶5. (U) The ELN announced on October 29 it would order its fronts in Samaniego, Narino Department, to facilitate the demining of the area. Former foreign ministers Maria Emma Mejia and Augusto Ramirez, members of the National Facilitation Commission, characterized the action as positive and said it reflected the progress the GOC and ELN had made in recent months.

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Cuban Role  
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¶6. (C) Akerman told us Cuban Communist Party official Tony Lopez appeared to play a negative role in Havana. The guarantors showed Lopez a draft ceasefire proposal they had previously drafted and shared with former Venezuelan vice Foreign Minister Pavel Rondon. Akerman said Lopez regarded the proposal as "interesting," but insisted the ELN should not make a deal with the GOC as long as the FARC was still in the field.

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Norway Standing By on Funding  
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¶7. (C) Nylander said Norway was examining two financial contributions: one for the process, and one for the ELN as an organization. The former could occur with GOC approval but the latter would require significant ELN movement on humanitarian issues and broader international community endorsement.

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